

any other industry in my State. I believe the public institutions and private businesses that lay the foundation for rural communities thrive only when we have a strong base of independent family farmers and ranchers in South Dakota.

Finally, agricultural producers are the day-to-day stewards of our land. Environmental and conservation benefits like clean water and air, rich soil, and diverse wildlife habitat are enjoyed by the public largely due to the care and management of family farmers and ranchers.

So, why aren't we truly celebrating National Agriculture Day?

Because current economic conditions are poised to squeeze many of South Dakota's 32,500 farmers and ranchers right out of business—conditions set to reverberate across the entire country. Absent farm aid and long-term farm policy fixes that provide true economic security to family farmers and ranchers, the environmental benefits and food security enjoyed by so many in this country may not survive on a sustained basis.

I believe Congress must take two fundamental steps to remedy this situation: modify the farm bill now and strengthen our laws so the marketplace is truly competitive and fair for all.

Since 1997, U.S. farmers have experienced a price crisis of enormous proportions, exacerbated by a series of weather-related disasters in many regions of the Nation. Surplus crop production, both here and abroad, weak global demand, marketplace concentration, and an inadequate farm income safety net are prime reasons for this price crisis.

Moreover, given the input-intensive nature of production agriculture, many farmers and ranchers are paying more each year for critical inputs like fuel and fertilizer. Corn and wheat farmers in South Dakota may be forced to pay up to twice per acre for fertilizer this year, and still not cover enough acres to boost yields to profit-producing levels. This situates farmers in a price-cost squeeze making it nearly impossible to earn income that covers total expenses.

As a result of an inadequate farm bill, Congress has enacted multi-billion dollar disaster programs in the last 3 years—a record \$28 billion in fiscal year 2000. USDA economists predict 2001 may be the worst year ever. Without supplemental income or emergency aid, USDA estimates that net farm income in 2001 could approach its lowest level since 1984. Clearly, the 1996 farm bill fails to provide a meaningful, fiscally-responsible, safety-net for farmers when prices are poor on an annual and sustained basis.

I am concerned that the administration's budget blueprint apparently does not grasp the economic obstacles facing the Nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, as illustrated by the fact that the budget includes zero

funding for emergency aid or a farm bill rewrite. This seems ironic, since every major farm group has sent myself and others on the Senate Budget Committee a letter agreeing that roughly \$10 billion per year will be needed to modify the farm bill for future years, and that around \$9 billion is needed in fiscal year 2001 to offset income losses due to low prices and failed farm safety-net policies.

Already, these farm groups and some Members of Congress are suggesting that we will simply assemble a fourth consecutive aid package for farmers in 2001. I will support this imperative aid when the time comes, but suggest American farmers and taxpayers deserve better. These ad hoc emergency bills, totaling billions of dollars each year, are a poor excuse for a long term policy fix. I believe Congress can and should amend current farm policy immediately to provide a more predictable, secure safety-net for farmers now.

One farm bill alternative I have introduced is S. 130, the Flexible Fallow farm bill amendment. Rep. DOUG BEREUTER (R-NE) has introduced an identical bill in the House. Under my Flex Fallow bill—an idea developed by two South Dakota agricultural producers—farmers voluntarily devoting part of their total cropland acreage to a conservation use receive greater price support on their remaining crop production. My proposal embodies the planting flexibility so popular under "Freedom to Farm," yet strengthens the underlying farm income safety net. In fact, my Flex Fallow bill has been endorsed by Iowa State agricultural economist Neil Harl, who believes the proposal works in a market-oriented fashion and said Flex Fallow "is the missing link to the 1996 Farm Bill."

Furthermore, I believe agricultural producers want to derive income from the marketplace, and in order to assure that can happen, Congress must restore fair competition to crop and livestock markets. The forces of marketplace concentration are squeezing independent farmers and ranchers out of profit opportunities.

The livestock market is one case in point. Meatpacker ownership and captive supply arrangements tend to transpire outside the cash market. As a result, the process of bidding in an open fashion for the purpose of buying slaughter livestock—which is central to competition—is fading away. As such, livestock producers—who depend upon competitive bidding to gain a fair price—are forced to either enter into contractual, ownership, or marketing arrangements with a packer or find themselves left out of market opportunities.

I have authored a bipartisan bill, S. 142, with Senators GRASSLEY, THOMAS, and DASCHLE to forbid meatpackers from engaging in these anticompetitive buying practices. While my legislation is just one of many steps that should be taken to bolster our laws to protect true market competition, I believe

Congress should move to address this issue in earnest.

Former President Eisenhower once said, "farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles away from a farm." Because we live in a country where the food is safe and affordable, and the environment is not taken for granted, perhaps some have forgotten President Eisenhower's simple yet honest-to-goodness words.

So today, let us not overlook the critical role farmers and ranchers play in weaving the economic, social, and environmental fabric of this country. Instead, I join all Americans to salute farmers and ranchers on National Agriculture Day. And I invite all Americans to support efforts to ensure a brighter future for the families who put food on our tables every day.

CONDEMNATION OF THE TALIBAN'S WAR ON GLOBAL CULTURE

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to condemn an act of mindless destruction by a regime known for its intolerance. I am referring to the reported destruction of the two ancient statues of Buddha carried out by the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the Taliban's call for complete elimination of all artifacts in the region.

The Bamiyan Buddha statues were priceless artifacts. They stood for centuries as guardians of the silk route that connected the ancient Greek and Roman Empires to Asia. Once one of the most cosmopolitan regions in the world, Afghanistan is now one of the most intolerant and repressive nations due to the actions of the ruling Taliban faction. The destruction of these 1,500-year-old statues was ordered and carried out for fear that they would be used for idol worship. Destroying those creations because of an irrational fear motivated by intolerance of other cultures and religions should be condemned by thoughtful people everywhere.

The country of Afghanistan and the global community has lost two of its greatest treasures, and the world is poorer for it. We cannot tolerate the willful destruction of international treasures that are a part of the world's heritage.

People of all faiths and nationalities, including Muslim communities around the world, have condemned this action. It is imperative that the United States Senate join the people and governments around the world in condemning these senseless acts of destruction, and call on the Taliban regime to immediately cease the destruction of other Pre-Islamic relics.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG SOLUTION MUST BE A PRIORITY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, few issues have caught the public's attention more than prescription drugs, and